

## THE MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

Thank you for the opportunity for organizations to share high priority education agenda items. Today I hope to touch your hearts *and* minds.

My name is Sherry Sparks and I am the President-elect for the Michigan Association for Gifted Children or as we are known, MAGC. We represent and advocate for gifted and talented children, youth and families throughout Michigan. We are the Michigan chapter of the National Association for Gifted Children.

At the present time there is no mandate or funding for gifted education. I am here this morning to ask that as you consider education legislation this year, you hold the thought that *ALL* children matter, gifted children included.

One popular myth about gifted children is that they will do just fine on their own without appropriate services. The phrase often used to describe them, "cream rises to the top" erroneously implies that gifted children **DO NOT NEED** empathy, nurturing, peers with whom they can connect, challenging work, and educators that can maximize their potential. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In his first inaugural address, Governor Snyder stated that one of his strategies for economic growth was to attract the best and brightest in all fields of endeavor to Michigan. How long will the families of these individuals remain in Michigan if their own children cannot receive a public gifted education?

The gifted make up 5-7% of our population. Based on the numbers of these children in populations across America, it is estimated that there are 13,000 gifted children and youth in *Wayne County alone* and there are thousands more in *every other* Michigan county. **Most of them are left to fend for themselves.**

With the best of intentions, America has attempted to elevate struggling students, which undoubtedly and without question should occur, but this one-pointed focus, nonetheless, has inadvertently and unintentionally stagnated our nation's progress by leaving its high ability and gifted children to fall through the cracks.

Michigan cannot afford to waste the minds of **ANY** our children. MAGC wants to ensure that *ALL* children, including the gifted, demonstrate academic growth and personal development commensurate with their potential. In that spirit we offer the following pathways:

### 1. MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENTS

Michigan's mandate for one year of student academic gain for one year in school went into effect this fall. The MEAP and MME tests *do not* provide educators with specific data about the true extent of a student's knowledge; they only measure *minimum* proficiency. In order to advance the academic achievement of all children, including the gifted, we must accurately assess both current academic levels *and* growth.

### 2. TEACHER TRAINING

Teacher training that includes gifted education components is essential for working effectively with gifted students. What we are asking is what I'm sure everyone sitting on this committee would like to see for all Michigan

students: trained teachers provided with the necessary tools to help students attain measurable annual growth. One wonderful benefit is that gifted educational strategies, curriculum, and assessment tools benefit *all* children...so why not ensure these engaging, exciting, challenging methodologies are available to all children by training teachers in gifted education?

### **3. GIFTED CHARTER SCHOOLS**

Families with gifted children have few options if their public school does not offer the types of educational programs and opportunities that will help their children realize their potential. The majority of parents with gifted children cannot afford private gifted schools.

For this reason, we ask you to allow gifted charter schools for students as an alternative pathway to maximizing their potential and ensuring their future contributions. We believe that most students would prefer to stay in their home districts if gifted programs were available, but in cases where districts do not offer these programs, we ask that you make gifted charter schools possible.

### **4. AN ALLOCATION OF 1% OF THE MICHIGAN EDUCATION BUDGET FOR GIFTED CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

In order to cement its status as the next world superpower, China has invested \$500 billion dollars in gifted education. China holds the firm belief that gifted children is the key to their nation's innovation, progress, and economic future. By identifying and targeting gifted children from all socio-economic groups, China has no doubt that the return on its investment will be massive.

In Michigan, gifted children in large part, remain unidentified and under-developed. When they are underserved they underperform. That means that gifted children ultimately, will under-contribute. Economically speaking, Michigan simply cannot afford to leave the potential of its gifted children to chance.

We are happy to offer more details than time allows today regarding the criteria, distribution and uses for the 1% allocation for gifted education. Briefly the allocation would fund:

- Teacher training in gifted education
- The development, implementation, and accountability of educational plans for gifted and talented students
- The purchase of high quality gifted materials, programs, and services

It is the gifted children of today who will make the future scientific and medical contributions that will someday improve lives. It is these children who will write novels and compose symphonies that will someday move souls.

***If we want young gifted people to be prepared when society needs them, we need to be there for them when they need us.*** Please include them in your budgetary and legislative decisions.

Thank you. For more information please contact Sherry Sparks at: sherry.sparks61@gmail.com or 248.844.5165.

## ***Definition of Children with Outstanding Talent***

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment.

These children and youth exhibit high performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by schools.

Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor.

*National Excellence: A Case for Developing America's Talent*  
U.S. Department of Education  
1993